

Interview with C. Conrad Manley

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C. CONRAD MANLEY

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Q: It is February 21, 1988. We are in Honolulu and I am doing an interview with C. Conrad Manley, a retiree of the U.S. Information Agency.

Connie was born on September 2, 1912 and he stayed quite a number of years with the USIA. You have a lot of reminiscences I know, Connie.

Your very first post for the Agency was in 1955, Montevideo, Uruguay.

FIRST ASSIGNMENT: URUGUAY: 1955

MANLEY: That is right. I had approximately three to four weeks of orientation and instruction at the Agency in Washington first and then I went to Montevideo in June of 1955.

Q: Does anything stand out in your mind about your period in Montevideo?

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MANLEY: Uruguay, at that time, was a very peaceful country. The things that bothered the Uruguayan most, during the period that I was there, until 1958, were soccer scores and the price of wool tops.

The Tupamaros and all the guerilla activity came much later.

Q: Well, it sounds like a very good post with which to break into the Agency. What was your next post?

BOGOTA: 1958

MANLEY: In '58, I was transferred to Bogota', Colombia, which was quite a change from sea level Montevideo to Bogota on top of the Andes.

Q: What do you think about Bogota? Any remembrances from that particular area, particularly about USIA activities?

MANLEY: We had a tremendous radio operation going in Bogota'. I think the Bogota'nos were reputed to have the best Spanish in all of Latin America and we got a lot of scripts and radio novellas from the Voice of America to translate and record with Colombian actors; on our own. We produced a good many radio programs and I recall we had something like twenty thousand tapes on circulation to Colombian radio stations at that time.

Q: That sounds like a very active post. You went from there to Miami. Tell us about Miami.

1961: MIAMI: THE BROADCASTS TO CUBA AFTER CASTRO TAKEOVER

MANLEY: Miami was a curious operation. When we broke relations with Castro in 1961, USIS - Havana was picked up bodily and moved to Miami.

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There it became pretty much a radio operation, short- wave radio. We produced two programs daily from news analyses of Cuban events and interviews with Cubans who had escaped from the island and made their way across the Straits.

It was quite an interesting operation and something entirely novel for the Agency.

Q: You were on U.S. soil and yet you were conducting USIA programs.

MANLEY: That is correct. We were listed in the Yellow Pages of the phone book and we often got people calling in to ask questions because they figured an information agency would be able to provide the answers to almost anything.

Actually, our operations were aimed almost entirely at Cuba by shortwave and we heard from refugees coming out that they were very well listened to.

One of them was "Buenos Dias, America." The other one was "Amaneces Cubana" and very often we found interviewees that we reached in Miami who were very familiar with our programs.

Q: That gives you a lot of satisfaction, I am sure, to know that what you were doing was really being listened to and having, perhaps, some very profound effect in Havana or in Cuba.

Well, here you were in Miami conducting a USIS program on American soil, Connie, but it was exciting in the long run, wasn't it?

MANLEY: It certainly was. We were always uncertain about what was happening in Cuba. For a long time, we were able to get Cuban magazines, Cuban newspapers sent to us through Mexico, to follow daily events in Havana.

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Also, we listened to Cuban radio. In Key West, we could pick up the sound of Cuban television. We recorded all of this and with the help of the Cuban Court Reporters Association, we got full texts of everything that Fidel Castro said in public every day.

Q: You devoted most of your time, while you were in Miami, to broadcasting to Cuba?

MAY, 1965: OPERATIONS IN DOMINICAN REPUBLIC CRISIS

MANLEY: Yes, all of our operations had a Cuban content or Cuban objective. However, in May of '65, when civil war broke out on the island of Hispaniola, when there was war between competing factions of the Dominican Republic, President Johnson sent in the 101st Airborne Division and the Second Marine Division under the guise of a Pan-American Union operation and the Agency sent down a team of, perhaps, twelve to fifteen people to work with the troops.

We were based in the house of the Dominican Public Affairs officer, Malcolm McLean and we were doing things like putting out a daily news sheet of information.

We were also circulating radio programs on tape and doing our own broadcasting, distributing films, all in support of the existing government of the Dominican Republic.

We worked very closely with the First Psychological Warfare Battalion of the 101st Airborne Division which I think may have been the first time the military had worked with a USIA team as part of their operations.

Q: That is very interesting, Connie. Now, that would make your third post. We are in Miami, but next you went in 1965, I note, to Mexico City.

MEXICO CITY: 1965

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MANLEY: That is right. I was back from the Dominican Republic only about three months when I was transferred to Mexico City as information officer of the USIS post there.

Q: That was quite an experience and I know that Mexico City made quite an impact on you.

MANLEY: I had been familiar with Mexico since around 1929 when as a high school kid, I got a job on a pipeline on the Mexican border near Laredo. I was very happy to go back to Mexico with USIA.

Q: You are a Texas boy, aren't you?

MANLEY: Not really. I was born in New Orleans, but when I was not quite ten, my family moved from Louisiana to Texas, so I had about seven years in Texas before I went off to college.

Q: Connie, tell me a little about your remembrances of your time in Mexico City.

MANLEY: Mexico is a fascinating country, so many differences and contrasts. I was able to visit every one of the Mexican states with the exception of one, the smallest state, Colima, on the Pacific coast. I thoroughly enjoyed my three years in Mexico, then and when the opportunity offered after my retirement, I went back there for six more years.

Q: Well, tell me, do you recall anything particularly exciting or different or unusual that happened while you were in Mexico City during this first tour?

VISIT OF PRESIDENT OF MEXICO TO WASHINGTON: 1968

MANLEY: The Mexico City operation of USIS was pretty standard. It had been a program in operation for a long time and was probably one of our largest overseas posts, but for

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me, I think one of the most interesting occurrences was a little outside of the ordinary field of Agency operations.

Early in 1968, Mexico's president, Gustavo Di'az Ordaz, made a state visit to Washington. His press secretary, not being familiar with Washington and having very little command of English, asked if I would go with him as his aide to help him.

I referred the request to our embassy and our ambassador, Fulton Freeman, approved it, so, off I went to Washington with President Di'az Ordaz, and some twenty or twenty-five Mexican newspaper, radio and television people. We set up camp in the Mayflower Hotel.

I was running around doing translations, little errands for the president's press secretary and trying to be as helpful as possible during the visit.

One highlight of the three-day visit, during which Mexico's president spoke to a joint session of Congress, was a press interview with Lyndon Johnson at the White House. He fielded questions for twenty minutes or so and as we were leaving, this group of Mexican journalists and I, Johnson shook hands with each and gave each of them one of his presidential pens.

When my turn came, he shook my hand, gave me a pen, and said, "You don't look like a Mexican." I did not get into any further conversation over that.

From Washington, we flew to El Paso, Texas; Johnson flying in a separate plane and, right on the border, he returned to Mexico, what was called the Chamizal, a fifteen-acre area of land along the Rio Grande which overnight, during a flood period, some years before, had shifted from the Mexican side to the American side.

During our brief visit to El Paso, Johnson returned the acreage to Mexico and the two presidents dedicated the land to a joint international park between the two countries.

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Q: Well, that was toward the end of 1968, I gather.

MANLEY: Early.

1968: TRANSFER TO KHARTOUM, SUDAN

Q: Early in 1968. Well, before the year was over, you were transferred to an entirely different part of the world, Connie. You were transferred to Khartoum, capital of the Sudan. That must have come as quite a surprise to you.

MANLEY: It was like a bolt out of the blue. I had no idea that I would ever serve outside the Latin American area and I accepted the assignment with some misgiving.

I was assured in Washington that I would have no problem with my zero knowledge of Arabic because I was told, after many years of English colonial rule and guidance in the Sudan, everyone I was likely to come in contact with would know English.

Q: Well, you were very familiar by that time with Spanish and one, therefore, I suppose, would think you would go to another Spanish-speaking country, but it did not happen that way. You went, instead, from Mexico City to Khartoum.

How did it strike you when you first arrived in that area of Africa?

MANLEY: I found the Sudanese very interesting people. Khartoum is certainly a cosmopolitan place and I enjoyed very much the new experiences of coming in contact with African people, Arab people, the opportunity that this gave us.

Q: Did anything happen in Khartoum which made a real dent in your imagination or in your memory?

MANLEY: Well, I was fascinated by the Nile and the mixture of the Arab northerners with the Central African blacks from the south.

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They were, at that time, in a constant state of civil war. It was unsafe to travel outside of Khartoum very far and I believe the situation now is still pretty much the same.

Q: Well, Connie, try to think of anything that may possibly have happened in Khartoum which had a great deal to do with USIS operations?

MILITARY COUP IN SUDAN:

MANLEY: I was out of the country attending a PAO conference in Nairobi when a military coup took place in the Sudan Colonel Gaafar Nimeiri threw out the civilian government and set up his own military government in Khartoum.

KHARTOUM BREAKS RELATIONS WITH U.S.

Not long after my return — we had had no embassy in Khartoum since the 1967 war between Egypt and Israel and, properly speaking, we were the American Interest Section of the Dutch Embassy - the Dutch ambassador was called to the Foreign Office and told six of his twelve officers in the Interest Section would have to leave the country. No reason was given for the expulsion.

In our case, that is USIS, it meant that I as PAO and John Thompson as my cultural officer, would leave and the entire operation would have to close down without an American officer in charge.

Q: How did it happen that we had no embassy in operation in Khartoum?

MANLEY: After the June '67 war between Israel and Egypt, Egypt broke relations with the United States and the Sudanese, as was their custom, followed the diplomatic lead of Cairo and broke relations with us. Our ambassador at that time, Bill Weathersby, was called home and Cleo Noel, his DCM, took charge of the section.

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AMBASSADOR CLEO NOEL ASSASSINATION

Q: Cleo Noel is a name I will always remember. He was assassinated, was he not, in Khartoum?

MANLEY: Noel finished out his second tour there at Khartoum and went back to Washington for three years. He returned for a third tour of duty as ambassador and a short time after his return, he was kidnaped along with, I think, two other foreign diplomats and the three of them were — this was by a Black September group, if I recall — the three of them were brutally killed.

1969 MANLEY EVICTED FROM KHARTOUM

Q: But you were not there at that time?

MANLEY: No, I left in July of 1969 — what happened was, I pointed out to one of our local employees, who happened to be a nephew of the Sudan's foreign minister, that when John Thompson and I left Khartoum, we would have to close down the USIS operation.

They did not want that to happen because our library was probably the best in Khartoum and we had a cool, well- lighted place for university students to study at night. So, they did not want to lose the facility — so they finally decided that Thompson and I still had to go but we could be replaced by the Agency in order to keep the USIS center in operation.

Q: Well, how long were you in Khartoum actually before you were told you had to leave?

MANLEY: I was there from October of '68 until July of '69.

JULY 1969 - KHARTOUM TO LIBYA

Q: Then, where did you go?

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MANLEY: I was transferred from Khartoum to Libya. I reached Tripoli, I recall, in July of '69, just five weeks before Muammar Qadhafi came to power when he overthrew King Idriss in September.

Q: That was, indeed, an event of momentous importance to Libya because from that grew the government that gave us all Muammar Qadhafi.

MANLEY: That is right. I was beginning to feel picked on at that point after Nimeiri and the Sudan and Qadhafi and Libya — I guess I was in Tripoli for, perhaps, seven or eight months before the Agency made it possible for me to take early retirement.

1970: RETIREMENT

Q: When did you actually retire?

MANLEY: My actual retirement, I think, is dated May 1, 1970.

Q: Now, retiring is quite a serious step to take. I know, having gone through that process myself and some of us do not have control over when it is going to happen. I know that was, in my case, the truth. Now, Connie, how did you feel about retiring?

MANLEY: Well, it really came before I was prepared for it. I had expected at least two or three more years of service, but early in 1970, the Agency, I suppose, to create vacancies in the upper ranks, made it very attractive for those of us who were over fifty and had twenty years or more of government service to take early retirement.

On very short notice, I had to decide whether I wanted that or not. The fact that I believed my next post in Africa would have been Nigeria probably influenced my decision to take retirement.

MANLEY CONTINUES PUBLIC AFFAIRS ACTIVITIES IN RETIREMENT

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Q: Well, you have done very well after retirement. I know a little about your activities after you retired from the Agency, but I would rather have you tell us about them.

MANLEY: Well, having been a newspaper man, a news writer, or involved in propaganda in some form since about 1934, I was anxious to continue in the field.

I was not ready to take to my rocking chair, so I went back to Mexico City and started working as a freelance newspaper correspondent, a course I followed for some six years before moving back to the United States in 1976.

Q: That was an enjoyable thing to do, I take it?

MANLEY: Very much so. I like writing and I enjoy reporting particularly, but I like the feeling of having the time to study a subject and to write and rewrite without a wire service or a newspaper deadline hanging over my head.

Q: Well, that sounds logical. I know you made a good go of it because I visited you twice while I was in Vietnam and on my way back to the East Coast of the United States for what they called SMA or home leave — it was not exactly home leave, but it was sort or —

MANLEY: R and R?

Q: R and R, yes, that we had going then and I could tell you enjoyed what you were doing very much. Now, after Mexico, you did something further in the field of journalism, I believe.

MANLEY: Well, one of the papers I worked for was the Dallas Morning News which wanted me to reopen for them a former news bureau in East Texas. That came a cropper, however, when the executive editor of the News retired and his successor did not want to carry out the project.

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So, quite by accident, I landed in New Iberia, Louisiana, as business editor of the Daily Iberian of that city, a job I carried out for some six years until 1984 when I retired, I think, for the third time.

Q: I do not think many people have that record, Connie, and I am sure you now having retired as you say for a third time, what do you do with yourself?

MANLEY: I continue to write for several publications in my area of Louisiana, but I am trying to devote about half of my time to getting to all of the places that I have read about or dreamed about or have been to and wanted to go back to.

I am trying as far as possible to stay on the road about half the time. That is, I travel for a month or so, and then go home for about an equal period before I take off again.

Two of my many interests are the Elderhostel program which is largely educational and of relatively brief duration; the other is the Earthwatch program, both of them based in or around Boston. The Earthwatch program is one which supports and provides volunteer workers for various scientific projects around the world. A LOOK BACK AT USIA CAREER

Q: You were with the U.S. Information Agency for fifteen or sixteen years before your retirement. Now, what is your overall impression of what the Agency does overseas? Did you find the whole thing very rewarding?

MANLEY: I have never done anything that I found more rewarding than the USIA program. I think it is vitally necessary and the United States suffered badly, I think, in the absence of a program of this kind.

If we do not tell our story abroad, someone else is going to do it for us and certainly to our disadvantage. During the sixteen years I had with USIA, I can think of very few moments that I was not happy with what I was doing, enjoying the friends I was making and the feeling of satisfaction that I had when I felt something we were doing had gone well.

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I would not change any of the experiences I had if I could do it again.

Q: Well, thanks very much. We have been talking to C. Conrad Manley, born September 2, 1912, who was with the U.S. Information Agency for approximately sixteen years.

He started out in Montevideo. His next post was Bogota, followed by a tour in Miami, USIS Miami, which is a VOA operation, or at least primarily so, which broadcast to Cuba, then went to Mexico City until 1968 and then changed his area of operations.

His arena became Africa. He went to Khartoum, of all places, and then after about a year there, having been told to leave because of various problems within the country, not because of anything he had done, but because they were getting - - they had a new government and wanted a change in personnel at what had been the American Embassy.

He went to Tripoli, Libya and there he was the information officer and that post would have been very exciting except they had a revolution which gave us Muammar Qadhafi.

End of interview